Revenge of the homophobes

After issuing a proclamation honoring gay and lesbian contributions to the Springs last week, the City Council was targeted with what one group calls "telephone terrorism" tactics by Focus on the Family and a handful of anti-gay activists.

City Hall was barraged with 200 calls when an angry James Dobson pre-empted his regular daily radio broadcast last Friday to urge his followers to protest the City Council's declaration.

Dobson also denounced local church leaders for not taking a stronger stance against homosexuality.

Conservative talk-show host Chuck Baker also used Mayor Mary Lou Makepeace as his on-air punching bag. Baker, who hosts an AM radio talk show five days a week, was joined all week by a small number of supporters in calling for a recall of the mayor.

Office supply store owner Ed Bircham, American Family Association President Tom Pedigo and dethroned radio talk-show host and conspiracy theorist Mike McKee have spent hours on the airwaves blasting the mayor and anyone who doesn't vehemently oppose homosexuality.

For his part, Baker allowed inflammatory — and incorrect — statements to be broadcast on his show. Referring on-air to the mayor, using a derogatory nickname "Butch," Baker falsely claimed that Makepeace's daughter has been given a high-paying job with the city and has two assistants.

On the air last Friday, one caller said he thought gays should be killed. PrideFest parade organizer Caroline Cathay said she was "stunned" when she heard the remark.

"They should have cut him off, but [Baker] just let him go on for maybe 20 seconds. It seemed like forever," she said.

The threat prompted PrideFest organizers to contact the FBI and issue a warning to parade participants to leave their children at home.

On Monday, Baker apologized on the air for the comment.

Open dialogue

Calling in from an undisclosed out-of-state location, Dobson joined two of his ex-gay employees to complain about shabby treatment during his special Friday broadcast.

The gay invasion had resulted in a week of fury for Focus. According to John Paulk, an ex-gay who is now the homosexuality and gender specialist at Focus, the organization was refused its rightful place at the National Religious Leadership Roundtable, which met last week in the Springs.

The final straw came when Dobson learned Makepeace had issued the PrideFest Week proclamation.

"I'd love to see some of our listeners place a call to our mayor's office," Dobson said, advising his listeners not to be "angry or hateful" when they called to complain.

"I always think it's interesting they have to put that advice out there," said Joseph Conn, a spokesman for the Washington, DC-based Americans United for the Separation of Church and State.

"What kind of followers do you have if you would have to assume that they wouldn't be kind and nice, and not hateful?"

Dobson also leveled his cannons at Colorado Springs' religious leaders, accusing them of allowing Focus on the Family to be singled out while "keeping their heads down and hardly utter[ing] a word of disbelief."

"There are 100 or more Christian ministries in Colorado Springs — where are their leaders?" Dobson complained.

A very charming lady

But, for Makepeace and nearly all of the Council members who signed the document, the proclamation was just a way to recognize a group of citizens.

So far this year, the mayor has signed off on 68 proclamations, honoring everything from Scleroderma Awareness Month to Groundhog Day, from Engineers Week to Licensed Practitioner Nurses Week and Lei Day.

Several months ago, Makepeace set off a firestorm of protest from the liberal left when she honored Christian Heritage Week. She also declared an Anti-pornography Week at the request of Pedigo, who this week blasted the mayor for endorsing gay PrideFest.

And, on May 6, Makepeace honored the National Day of Prayer at the request of Shirley Dobson, wife of Focus President James Dobson and chairwoman of the National Day of Prayer.

Makepeace described Shirley Dobson, who attended the signing of the proclamation, as "a very complimentary, very charming lady."

"I was surprised at the strong reaction from Focus on the Family," Makepeace said. "But I still say that this is a city of people with a wide spectrum of viewpoints and this is a mayor's office for all the people."

Barrage of calls

From Washington, Conn noted with interest the groups that "want the government to promote their religious perspective" but then go ballistic when they disagree elsewhere.

"Dobson has become a specialist in what I call telephone terrorism," he said. "[City Hall's] phones are so tied up that they may not be able to conduct their ordinary government business because of the barrage of calls."

"They've been nonstop; we can't get anything else done," said City Council assistant Dean Beukema of the calls.

Beukema and Makepeace said numerous calls and e-mails of support also were recorded. One constituent sent the following:

"I heartily applaud your reaction, stating that we are all citizens of Colorado Springs and that we all must be accepted and accepting," the woman wrote.

"I am not a member of the gay community, but to be honest, I am quite tired of Focus on the Family trying to mandate what others do/feel/believe."

— Cara DeGette

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Ed Bircham protesting last week's PrideFest parade.

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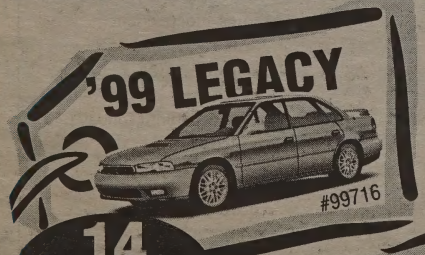

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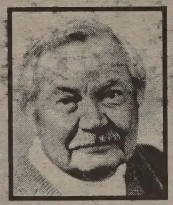

by William Edelen

On this labor day weekend I am thinking about all the slop we have been subjected to about 'serving mankind'. I am asking 'who is it that really 'serves mankind'? My answer is this: every person who daily labors to the best of his/her ability with honesty, integrity, competency, skill, and excellence is 'serving mankind' as a living example.

Federal Judge Learned Hand, one of my heroes, had no superior in the jurisprudence of the English speaking world. In a commencement address at Bryn Mawr College he said this to the young graduates:

"Observe, I suggest no sense of service. More hypocrisy is poured out to youthful ears in the name of 'serving mankind' than would fill a library of books. I can remember the droning on that score that I had to listen to, that I should become a drudge in some distasteful pursuit to assist a mankind not visibly affected by similar endeavors.

" If it be selfishness to work on a job one likes, and live as one wants, because one likes it and for no other end, let us accept the odium. I had rather live forever in a company of Don Quixotes, than among a set of the walking dead professing to be solely moved to the betterment of one another.

me to be so dreary and empty I will have no part in their pallid enterprises. Let us then do our jobs for ourselves and we are in no danger of disserving society.

" Though six associations, groups, companies, combinations, or societies for the improvement of mankind, with their combined boards of directors, secretaries, stenographers and field agents, were to be put into some scale against six honest carpenters who liked their job, they would kick the beam as high as Euripides.

" The six honest carpenters may serve as a beacon for all time, and men and women will love them. Be that as it may, six honest laborers who do their job because they like it and for no other reason will save themselves. That is enough to ask.""

Those words ring in my head as truth, on this labor day weekend.

Before the gates of excellence the high gods have placed sweat. For as Eric Hoffer reminds us "talent is a species of vigor."

If we lose the sense of excellence in our daily labor we will become weak as a people and as a nation. If we lose our respect and admiration for craftsmanship, our vigor as a people will decline in direct pro-portion.

On this labor day, whether a carpenter or a CEO, that person doing their daily work with integrity, excellence, honesty and competence is the jewel in society and the prime example of what it means to 'serve